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ABSTRACT

This paper shares the development and evolution of a pragmatic-experiential model of teacher education at the University of West Alabama. The model is grounded in the theories and philosophies promoted by Dewey and James. The philosophy of pragmatism encourages testing the authenticity or truth of ideas through experience. Experientialism, an elaboration of pragmatism, views knowledge as most useful when tested in a social context. The educational practices utilized within the model encourage the development of teachers who are committed to developing citizens for democracy. More specifically, the pragmatic-experiential model prepares teachers who: (1) participate in collaboration to recognize the social nature of learning and the power of the collective community; (2) employ application for progression of professional growth from a novice candidate in pre-professional experiences to consciously pragmatic-experiential teachers; (3) practice inquiry to make discoveries in response to novel situations and to pose questions as critical thinkers in planning and decision-making; and (4) utilize reflection to engage in a disciplined analysis of situations which generates alternatives and results in deeper understanding. The students develop these competencies through a logical sequence of courses and experiences in general studies, professional studies, pracitcums, and student teaching. (Author/ND)

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ED 410 202

DEWEY REVISITED: A PRAGMATIC-EXPERIENTIAL MODEL FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

A Thematic Topic for *The Educational Forum*

Submitted July 26, 1997

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to share the development and evolution of a Pragmatic-Experiential model for teacher education which is grounded in the theories and philosophies promoted by Dewey and James. The philosophy of pragmatism encourages testing the authenticity or truth of ideas through experience. Experientialism, an elaboration of pragmatism, views knowledge as most useful when tested in a social context.

This paper will highlight the educational practices utilized within the model which encourage the development of teachers who are committed to developing citizens for democracy. More specifically, the Pragmatic-Experiential model prepares teachers who: (1) participate in collaboration to recognize the social nature of learning and the power of the collective community; (2) employ application for progression of professional growth from a novice candidate in pre-professional experiences to consciously pragmatic-experiential teachers; (3) practice inquiry to make discoveries in response to novel situations and to pose questions as critical thinkers in planning and decision-making; and (4) utilize reflection to engage in a disciplined analysis of situations which generates alternatives and results in deeper understanding.

Dewey Revisited: A Pragmatic Experiential Model
for Teacher Education

The University of West Alabama (UWA) was chartered in 1835 as a church-related female academy. After challenging times during the Civil War and Reconstruction periods, the school was reopened under new administration and eventually diplomas were awarded from the first normal school in the state of Alabama in 1886. During this time, the school remained under the control of its board of trustees until the Alabama State Legislature created a State Board of Trustees for all normal schools in 1911. During these early years the school offered both secondary education and normal school programs for the training of teachers.

Today, the university's growth has created the need to develop a broader mission as a regional university which now awards associate, bachelor, and master's degrees in a variety of colleges. To ensure that integrity and quality are maintained within the academic development of those degree programs the university has obtained program accreditation from both state and national organizations. This paper will describe how the College of Education at UWA redesigned its mission statement and philosophical framework to successfully address the modern day accreditation standards in today's era of educational reform.

The Evolution of a Teacher Education Model

The training of teachers continues to be a major emphasis at the University of West Alabama, and professional education programs and course work are a significant part of the university curriculum and student enrollment. The teacher education model at UWA has continued to evolve through several phases over the past thirty years. During the spring of 1969, the faculty members in the College of Education (COE) reviewed ten competency-based models was completed to identify an appropriate framework for the program needs of the college. As a result of this study, the faculty concurred that no such single model which addressed the needs of their program existed. Therefore, the decision to construct a model incorporating specific components from existing models was made.

The foundation of the model eventually developed during the 1970's was the premise

that a competent teacher must possess a specific base of knowledge and be able to apply that knowledge base. The model was also performance based and emphasized society's need for teachers who possess competencies as diagnosticians and facilitators of learning. As a result of informal reports from practitioners in the university's service area and interning students within the program, the faculty decided to incorporate more practical experiences. Thus, in 1981, the model was labeled "pragmatic" to emphasis these changes in the program. The program then presented a systematic pattern of experiences designed to develop specific concepts, skills, and competencies in the clinical setting.

In the late 1980's a modified version of the model emerged. After reassessing the model, faculty members then concluded that the model should also embrace in its experiential basis an emphasis on attempting new and unproven uses of knowledge. As a result of those deliberations and discussions, enhanced experiences related to critical thinking, problem-solving, and learning styles were added. Another major evolution of the model was the identification of professional literature, scholarly research, basic knowledge, and learned societies as cornerstones to the model. The emerging pragmatic-experiential model of the 1990's still embodies the premise that teachers must possess a knowledge base and be able to apply it effectively.

Philosophical Framework of the Pragmatic-Experiential Model

To the faculty in the College of Education, a philosophy of education provides a coherent system of principles and practices underling a model of teacher education. The faculty has translated the conceptual knowledge provided by pragmatic philosophers and experiential theorists into practice typifying or approximating situations in everyday life. The faculty's intention was to incorporate this pragmatic conceptual knowledge into the structure and the process of teacher education by providing experiential opportunities to the prospective teacher for acquiring and testing ideas with practical implications. Pragmatism is a method of testing the authenticity or truth of ideas through logical reasoning, observation, and even personal experiences if they have practical consequences (Dewey, 1931; Schefler, 1974; and Perkinson, 1980;) According to James, "Pragmatism is humanistic in that it places emphasis on the whole person and on an active search for reality, utilizing both objective and subjective modes of acquiring knowledge. Pragmatists urge the

teacher to formulate hypothesis and test them through experiments in classroom practices" (1975, p. 44).

Experientialism maintains that knowledge is validated from experiences in relation to the social context in which they are gained. Experientialists think that philosophical inquiry has worth only when it addresses "issues which are analyzable in terms of actual or possible experience" and that philosophers should consider only those concepts and hypotheses which have "experiential implications or effects" (Suckiel, 1982, p. 4-5). Through experiential learning the student becomes an active participant in the teaching-learning process, thereby gaining opportunities to test the validity of acquired knowledge through interaction with others.

The philosophical name "Pragmatic-Experiential" identifies that both pragmatism and experientialism are essential frames of reference in conceptualizing the teacher education model at the University of West Alabama. Both frames of reference have contributed to the historical development of the mode as it has evolved over the past twenty-five years **(Figure 1.1)**.

[Figure 1.1 here]

The constructs of critical inquiry, usefulness of knowledge, and the relative nature of knowledge form the pragmatic basis of the model. The pragmatic basis supports an emphasis on the integration of theory with practice and the use of research-based knowledge in the teacher education program. Likewise, the constructs of sensory experiences, selective perception of reality, and the validation and verification of ideas are used to form the experiential basis of the model. The experiential basis strengthens and supports the practice of turning meaningful learning experiences and processes of logical analysis, such as inductive and deductive reasoning to validate ideas.

College of Education faculty members generated the academic components of the evolving model through the utilization of those pragmatic and experiential constructs. Those components are general education, teaching content area, professional studies, student teaching/internship, and professional practice. They emphasize a blend of proven ideas and practices with the need for experimentation with new ideas and practice. They evolve from pragmatic thinking and are based upon the usefulness of knowledge, the relative

nature of knowledge, and methods of critical inquiry. Such pragmatic concepts also form the basis for college of education course syllabi.

Experiential thinking is currently reflected in the model through the inclusion of clinical experiences in most course work. Field experiences provide opportunities for sensory experiences, selective perception of reality, validation and verification of ideas, meaningful learning, and logical analysis (McIntyre & Byrd, Eds., 1995) Validation and verification of successful practices and the testing of new ideas and practices culminate in internships and student teaching.

The primary focus of teacher education at the University of West Alabama is the learner in the context of a social environment. With such a focus, instruction becomes more than a teacher transmitting facts and information to students. More preferably, teacher education at UWA is guided by the thought that optimal learning occurs when students participate in the discovery of information and when they are able to employ that information in a social context; thus leading to, in the words of Dewey (1946, p. 48), "intelligent actions that follow knowledge". This pragmatic vision of education rests on the organization of knowledge in a scientific manner and the use of such knowledge in the improvement of social institutions.

The philosophy of teacher education at UWA, based on pragmatism and experientialism, also incorporates an analysis and understanding of current theories and practices derived from professional literature, scholarly research, and the learned societies. Furthermore, it underscores the significance of a scientific attitude toward education and the practical verification of theoretical ideas. In adhering to these philosophical premises, the faculty within the College of Education at UWA think that the teacher education program should educate prospective teachers who possess not only the ability to select learning experiences that are practical and apply them effectively in today's classrooms but also that those future teacher leave with the ability to effectively adapt to changes in future classroom situations.

Program Elements

Each program offered in the College of Education in cooperation with the College of Liberal Arts, the College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, and the College of Business and Commerce reflects a systematic pattern of experiences designed to

develop the knowledge base or the teacher education model. These programs have been developed from modern theories and models of teacher education, guidelines of the learned societies, findings of scholarly research, and actual classroom situations. All programs comply with the most recent certification standards of the Alabama Department of Education.

The program elements at the undergraduate level contain the essentials of teacher education delineated by Shulman (1987). These include general principles and practices of teaching and learning; salient features of curriculum and its various patterns; and integration of content and pedagogical principles; and knowledge of content, learners, educational context, and goals and purposes of education. A broad general education at the initial stages of baccalaureate education and an internship as its culmination result in an effective sequence of courses and experiences which give the prospective teacher insight into the theories and practices of teacher education.

Graduate level education provides deeper insight into the areas of pedagogical understanding named above. The major elements of the program are the core, with historical, philosophical, and behavioral foundation; research and evaluation; professional courses in teaching and curriculum/ and content courses in the teaching field.

Program Goals

Each program within the College of Education at UWA reflects a systematic design with an explicitly stated philosophy and objectives. Coherence exists between course work and experiences as well as between program purposes and outcomes. Grounded within the aforementioned philosophy, broad goals for the professional teacher education program were identified by the COE faculty. Those goals are: (1) to provide basic knowledge and professional education for prospective teachers and other school personnel in various specialized areas, based upon the selection and integration of current theories and practices supported by professional literature, scholarly research, and learned societies; (2) to study and analyze teacher roles and prepare individuals for these roles; (3) to review analyze, select, and implement components of teacher education, courses and objectives under each competent, and experiences that supplement the conceptual aspects of professional education based upon the pragmatic-experiential constructs; (4) to formulate

and adopt policies essential to the implementation and monitoring of curricula in specialized areas of teacher education; (5) to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher education curricula on a regular basis; ane (6) to enhance faculty participation in the processes of curriculum development and the implementation of curricular patterns.

Program Objectives

Teacher education students completing the baccalaureate program in the College of Education are expected to achieve the following common objectives: (1) to develop a broad background of knowledge in physical sciences, mathematics, social sciences, and liberal arts as a basis for professional competence; (2) to comprehend and internalize the goals and purposes of education at its various levels; (3) to develop reasoning and critical thinking as a result of their studies in teacher education; (4) to apply problem solving and decision-making skills in regard to planning, implementing, and evaluating instruction; (5) to use formal and informal measures for assessing the needs and abilities of learners; (6) to acquire skills necessary to maintain professional relationships with students and peers of diverse cultural backgrounds; and (7) to acquire and maintain adequate knowledge of content area/teaching fields. Also, students at the graduate level are expected to refine and extend the knowledge and skills listed above, to begin to apply them in supervisory and/or educational leadership roles, and to develop skills. More specific objectives for each academic course are listed on the course syllabi.

Coherence Between Courses/Experiences and Purposes/Outcomes

The courses/experiences are integrally connected to the purposes/outcomes that are derived from the philosophy of the College of Education. As a function of the strategic planning process, each academic department of the College of Education developed an Expanded Statement of Purpose for the University. Each Expanded Statement of Purpose delineates specific objectives or outcomes. Each course in the curriculum constitutes a unit of instruction designed to achieve particular purposes and outcomes of the Expanded Statement of Purpose. Further, each course incorporates one or more of the four process strands (to be discussed later) of the pragmatic-experiential model. Also, although courses vary in terms of the ratio between conceptual and practical experiences, consistent with the model, most courses show a close correspondence between theory

and practice.

The Expanded Statement of Purpose delineates not only objectives or outcomes buyt also assessment strategies for each objective. The historical development of teacher education, particularly from the competency-based system of the 1970's, necessitated producers providing for both formative and summative evaluation of the programs as well as the courses and experiences within each program. Refined and enhanced, the evaluation process developed during that period continues to provide a strong link between the courses/experiences and the purposes/outcomes. This link will be strengthened further through the new requirement that student performance relative to each objective for all teacher education courses to be assessed.

Description of the Model

The faculty members in the College of Education worked cooperatively to review, modify, design, and implement programs of study to ensure that they conform to the current knowledge base practices of professional education. The present model of teacher education, thematically identified as a "pragmatic-experiential" model encompasses recent educational theories and research and evolved as a result of faculty collaboration.

The University of West Alabama's Pragmatic-Experiential Teacher Education Model is anchored in its knowledge base. This knowledge base is derived from the following four sources; basic knowledge, scholarly research, professional literature, and learned societies. These four sources serve as the 'cornerstones' on which the model was designed. The knowledge base also serves as the foundational framework for the philosophy of education; goals, objectives, and purposes; the structure of the programs; the theoretical and practical content of courses; and the evaluation of courses and programs.

It is the function of goals and objectives which to provide direction for teacher training course work within the program. The common goals and objectives which were presented in a previous section provide the basis for the Expanded Statement of Purpose for each program. The expanded Statement of Purpose provides the framework for the goals and objectives of each program, from which course objectives were derived.

In addition to the purposes and goals discussed previously, four process strands permeate the model and serve as unifying concepts for the teacher certification curricula.

These four process strands are ***inquiry, reflection, application***, and ***collaboration***; they represent cardinal traits of all teachers trained with the pragmatic-experiential model. Such teachers practice ***inquiry*** in response to novel situation, making their own discoveries and continuously developing in the ability to pose questions and think critically when planning and making other decisions. Teachers trained within the pragmatic-experiential model should develop the trait of ***reflection***, systematically engaging in a disciplined analysis of situations and thereby generating alternatives and developing a deeper understanding of such situations. Recognizing the social nature of learning (Dewey, 1938) and the power of the collective community, pragmatic-experiential teachers participate in ***collaboration*** to maximize learning potential for their students and promote their own professional development. These teachers continuously seek new and varied ***applications*** of knowledge in all areas of teaching, thereby progressing from novice candidates in the preprofessional program to the consciously pragmatic-experiential teacher who tests the validity of knowledge by the extent to which it is useful in solving practical problems. Through the use of ***inquiry, reflection, collaboration***, and ***application*** at each level of the program, pragmatic-experiential teachers are able to do the following successfully: (a) select teaching/learning strategies that are practical and workable; (b) involve students in direct, hands-on learning experiences; (c) experiment with ideas and strategies to bring about effective student learning; (d) engage in reflective thinking; and (e) appreciate learners in varied social contexts.

Within the College of Education at the University of West Alabama pragmatic-experiential teachers develop these competencies through a logical sequence of courses and experiences. The first component of the teacher education curricula consists of general studies. Student enrolled in teacher education take courses in the traditional liberal arts and sciences curriculum, including English, fine arts, social sciences, mathematics, and the physical and natural sciences. Course work for students in teacher education becomes more focused on specific content areas when the student enters the teaching content area of the model. Along which the liberal arts core curriculum, upper-level courses fulfill the requirements for subject area certification.

Professional studies curricula comprises the next segment of the model. This

component consists of foundations of professional studies, methods of teaching and media, and measurement and evaluation. In addition to theoretical knowledge, students gain practical experience through observing and participating in actual elementary and/or secondary school settings as a part of the academic requirements of these courses. Such practical experience prepares the student for the final preservice training stage of the program, student teaching/internship, which is completely field based. In this stage the student is placed under the direction of a practicing classroom teacher and a University supervisor.

After a student has completed the training phases of the program, s/he graduates and upon receiving their teaching certification may enter the professional practice stage of the program. During this stage the student becomes an employed teacher. The faculty of UWA continues its contact with the graduate by offering assistance to beginning teachers, professional staff development, graduate study programs, and other services.

A feedback loop around the model and within each segment of the model provides for changes within the components of the model. Data for possible changes are generated through a variety of assessment activities which involve students, faculty, and practicing educators. A diagram of the Pragmatic-Experiential Model at the University of West Alabama is displayed in Figure 1.2.

[Insert Figure 1.2 here]

Application of the Model in the K-12 Schools

As the preservice teacher enters the clinical classroom to complete their assigned field experiences and internships, their continued professional growth is expected to be fueled through the four process strands of inquiry, reflection, application, and collaboration. All preservice teachers exercise reflection from the first day of stepping into the clinical setting by maintaining a daily journal which records the thoughts, reactions, questions, and concerns they may have which may have been generated from that days involvement with their clinical environment. The journals are monitored by the university supervisors and are used to stimulate dialogue and address situations encountered by the preservice teacher. This practice also allows the opportunity for responses to preservice teacher inquiry regarding their sensory/hands-on experiences in the clinical setting. Through continuous collaboration

with their cooperating teachers the preservice teachers are guided into the use of multiple teaching strategies and classroom applications that best match the students in any particular classroom.

Throughout the application of educational theory within the scope of the four process strands, the preservice teachers are reminded to continue, not only as a student intern but also as a learner within the social context of the clinical setting's social environment. Adhering to this philosophy based on pragmatism and experientialism, the College of Education strives to develop prospective teachers who truly possess the ability to select appropriate learning experiences for their students and who also recognize the need to adapt to a changing educational system.

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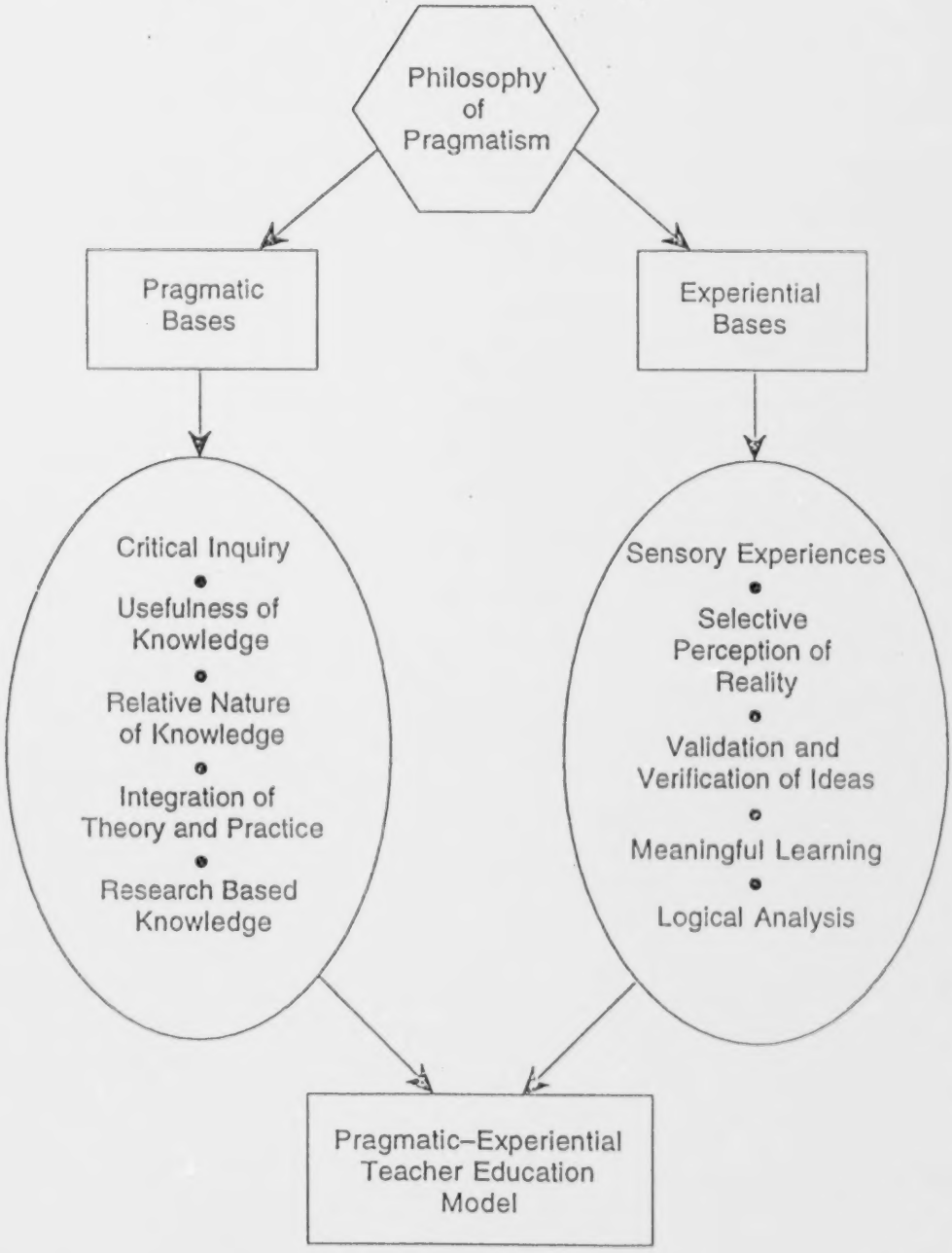

Figure 1.1 Philosophical Basis For Pragmatic-Experiential Model of Teacher Education at University of West Alabama

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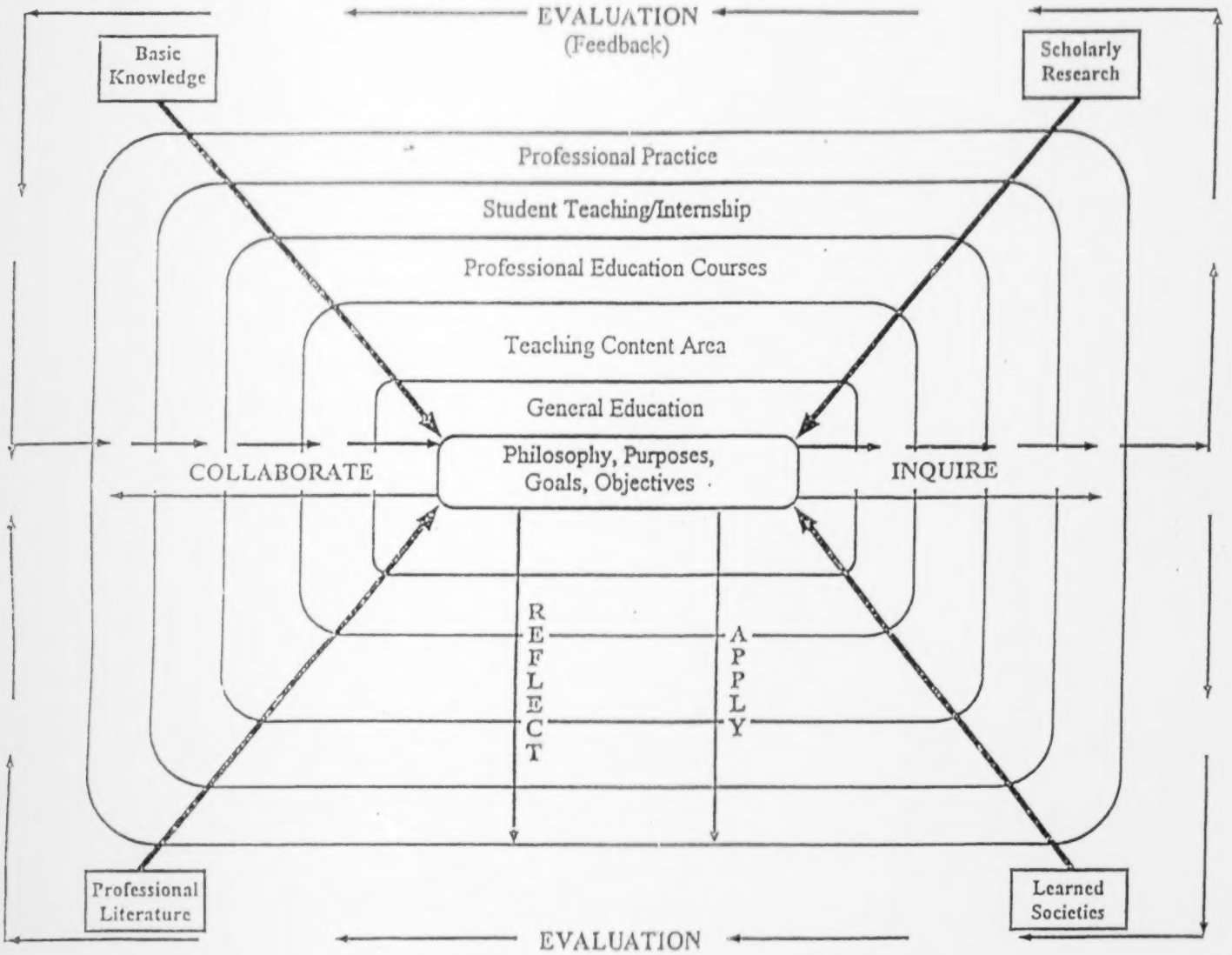

Figure 1.2 Pragmatic-Experiential Teacher Education Model of University of West Alabama
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